

Improving your HCAHPS Scores

Driving Patient Satisfaction and
Empathetic Care



Improving Your HCAHPS Scores

Driving Patient Satisfaction and Empathetic Care



Introduction

Over time, healthcare has seen a shift from the disease centered model, where healthcare decisions are almost exclusively made based on clinical experience and medical data towards a more patient centric care, in which patients are active participants in their healthcare decisions. Part of this shift includes a heightened focus on patient satisfaction and patient engagement. In fact, more than half of healthcare executives rate patient experience and satisfaction as two of their top three priorities (1).

HCAHPS
The Hospital
Consumer Assessment
of Healthcare
Providers and
Systems

1. Patient Experience the Key to Improving HCAHPS Scores. (n.d.). Retrieved May 19, 2017, from <http://www.hhnmag.com/articles/7813-patient-experience-the-key-to-improving-hcahps-scores>

What is the HCAHPS Survey?

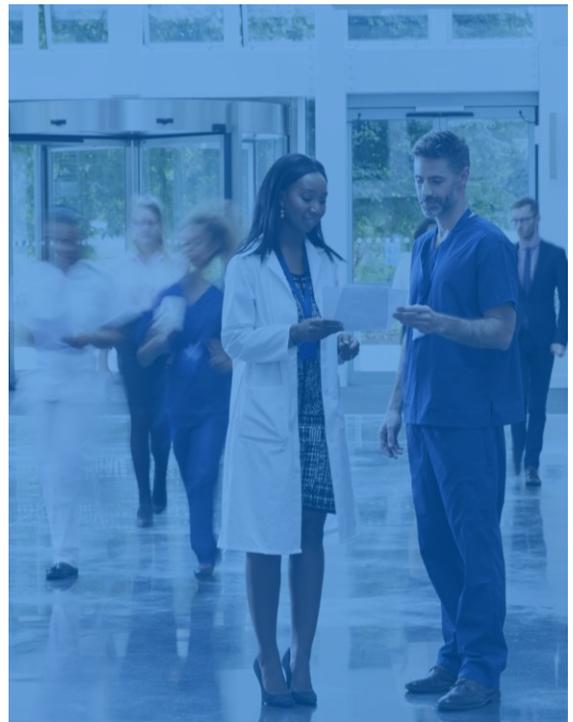
The Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (HCAHPS) survey was put into effect to establish a nationwide standard for gauging patient satisfaction in 2006. Prior to that, while many healthcare facilities had implemented their own methods to gauge patient satisfaction, there had not traditionally been a way to compare them across hospitals on a local, regional or national level (2). HCAHPS survey results are public, providing patients with a way to make more knowledgeable decisions on their choice of healthcare providers (2).

The HCAHPS Survey is required for all healthcare facilities receiving federal funding by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) and was first implemented in 2006 (2). The first public reporting of HCAHPS results took place in March, 2008 (2). The HCAHPS Survey asks adult inpatients (excluding psychiatric patients) to gauge their experience and satisfaction with their healthcare (2). Not only do the scores allow patients to make more informed choices when selecting care, but they also provide additional incentive for hospitals to improve care.

HCAHPS serves as a national standard to measure the following key areas:

- Doctor communication
- Nurse communication
- Staff responsiveness
- Hospital environment
- Pain management
- Medication communication
- Discharge information
- Food services &
- Overall rating of the hospital

The rating scale is based on frequency and consistency with the following answer choices: “Never”, “Sometimes”, “Usually” and “Always” (2).



2. Hospital HCAHPS. (2014, September 25). Retrieved May 19, 2017, from <https://www.cms.gov/medicare/quality-initiatives-patient-assessment-instruments/hospitalqualityinits/hospitalhcahps.html3>

Why are HCAHPS scores important?

HCAHPS scores can have a direct effect on hospital reimbursement. Poor HCAHPS scores yield lower reimbursement amounts, while high scores ensure the financial strength of the hospital. As part of the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005, acute care hospitals subject to the Inpatient Prospective Payment System (IPPS) must gather and provide HCAHPS data to receive their full IPPS annual payment (2). It is also the responsibility of the hospital to publicly report the scores. If HCAHPS scores are not publicly reported as required, IPPS payments can be reduced by up to 2% (2).

The public reporting of HCAHPS scores is also significant. Poor scores can negatively impact the reputation of the hospital, while high scores can improve a hospital's reputation and demand.



2. Hospital HCAHPS. (2014, September 25). Retrieved May 19, 2017, from <https://www.cms.gov/medicare/quality-initiatives-patient-assessment-instruments/hospitalqualityinits/hospitalhcahps.html#3>

How can HCAHPS scores be improved?

At their core, HCAHPS surveys measure patient satisfaction. The most effective way to increase patient satisfaction is to better engage the patient population in their care. Patients need to be empowered to collaborate with healthcare professionals in their care decisions. Once patients feel more engaged in their care, satisfaction levels are bound to rise.

Increasing Patient Engagement

A NEJM Catalyst Insights Report on patient satisfaction and engagement shows that patients who are engaged with their physicians and health care plans report higher levels of satisfaction with their care (3). As part of the study, researchers gathered insights on patient satisfaction and engagement from health care executives as well as clinician leaders throughout the U.S. (3). When asked to define patient engagement, an overwhelming majority of participants included the following key elements:

- Patients wish to actively make decisions with their providers about their health care.
- Patients want to actively be involved in care plans both in and out of the hospital.
- Patients wish to work towards improving their health (3).

Training Your Staff

Another way to positively influence HCAHPS scores is through staff awareness. Hospital staff must be trained to adopt a more patient-centric approach to care and should be made aware of the consequences of low scores (4). This is essential considering scores are largely based on the quality of patient-provider interactions. Patient experience should be a key factor in the cultural foundation of the healthcare organization at large. When bringing new staff on board, it is important to ensure that members demonstrate the same cultural values surrounding patient experience and patient satisfaction as the overall organization. If such value is placed on patient care company-wide, patient satisfaction will naturally rise (4).



3. Patient Engagement Survey Results: Better Tools Are Needed. (2017, February 21). Retrieved May 19, 2017, from <http://catalyst.nejm.org/patient-engagement-report-improved-engagement-leads-better-outcomes-better-tools-needed/>

4. 5 Ways to Raise HCAHPS Scores via Staff Engagement. (n.d.). Retrieved May 19, 2017, from <http://www.healthleadersmedia.com/hr/5-ways-raise-hcahps-scores-staff-engagement?page=0%2C3>

Effectively Communicating with Limited English Proficiency Patients



When it comes to patient/provider communication, the Limited English Proficiency (LEP) and Deaf/Hard of Hearing (HOH) populations are particularly vulnerable. Without an effective language access solution in place, language barriers can negatively impact communication quality. Satisfaction scores for these patient populations quickly increase with the use of qualified medical language services, including video remote interpretation, over-the-phone interpretation, on-site interpretation and translation services.

Improving Communication

Communication is a major area of focus on HCAHPS surveys e.g. doctor communication, nurse communication, staff responsiveness, medication communication and discharge information (2). This suggests that the most effective way to improve HCAHPS scores is to ensure that frequent and meaningful patient-provider communication is taking place in all areas of practice. Patients must have meaningful access to healthcare information including what to expect while in the hospital as well as health care plans post discharge involving medications, doses, outpatient therapy etc.

A recent study by the International Medical Interpreter Association (IMIA) demonstrates that the use of professionally trained medical interpreters significantly increases both LEP patients' and their health providers' satisfaction with communication (5). In accordance with Section 1557 of the Affordable Care Act, patients must be informed about their health condition, medication, post discharge plan and follow up plans in a way they can understand (6). Maintaining open communication with patients during transitions of care is particularly important for LEP and Deaf/HOH patients and should always be done with the assistance of a qualified medical interpreter.

5. Bagchi, A. D., Dale, S., Verbitsky-Savitz, N., Andrecheck, S., Zavotsky, K., & Eisenstein, R. (n.d.). Examining Effectiveness of Medical Interpreters in Emergency Departments for Spanish-Speaking Patients With Limited English Proficiency: Results of a Randomized Controlled Trial. Retrieved April 20, 2017, from http://www.imiaweb.org/uploads/docs/using_professionally_trained_interpreters_to_increase_patient_provider_satisfaction.pdf

6. Compliance with Section 1557 of the Affordable Care Act: Requirements Related to Individuals with Limited English Proficiency. Retrieved April 24, 2017, from <http://www.nachc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/12.16-Section-1557-Compliance-fact-sheet.pdf>



Fostering A Positive Work Environment

Another way to improve HCAHPS scores is to ensure a healthy working environment for healthcare staff. A study by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation found that stress stemming from healthcare staff can be absorbed by the patient (8). The study also indicated that improved work environments can greatly improve patient satisfaction and care, reducing patient readmissions within 30 days of discharge (8).

Improving Patient Comfort

Two other areas that consistently yield low scores include time spent waiting and noise level (7). To yield higher patient satisfaction scores in these areas, providers must be considerate of the patient's time and sensitivity to noise. One way to avoid noise at night is to reduce the use of overhead paging and phone calls. Patient wait times can be reduced via technology i.e. secure communication tools, including video conferencing and video remote interpretation platforms. These tools give patients faster access to care, shorten wait times and enhance patient engagement, often resulting in higher patient satisfaction (7).

The use of professionally trained medical interpreters significantly increases both LEP patients' and their health providers' satisfaction with communication.

8. McHugh, M. PhD, JD, MPH, RN; Ma, C. PhD, RN. Hospital Nursing and 30-Day Readmissions Among Medicare Patients with Heart Failure, Acute Myocardial Infarction, and Pneumonia. (n.d.). Retrieved May 19, 2017, from http://journals.lww.com/lww-medicalcare/Abstract/2013/01000/Hospital_Nursing_and_30_Day_Readmissions_Among.11.aspx

Conclusion

With patient satisfaction being top of mind for the majority of healthcare facilities in the U.S., it is more important than ever to adopt a more patient centric approach to care, including a heightened focus on patient satisfaction and patient engagement.

The HCAHPS survey was put into effect to establish a nationwide standard for gauging patient satisfaction. While poor scores can negatively affect the reputation of the facility, striving for high scores can result in additional reimbursement, stronger organizational culture, a better working environment, enhanced patient-provider communication, particularly with limited English proficient patients and overall improved care.

To learn more, visit our website now at
www.stratusvideo.com

